

Dostoevskii and the Book of Job: The Struggle to Find Faith

Vanessa Rampton
King's College, UK

Abstract: The book of Job is essential for understanding Dostoevskii's art, because of the similarity of the questions the authors engage with and the way their texts are constructed. However, ambiguities in the book of Job itself as well as disagreements about the presentation of faith and doubt in Dostoevskii's fiction have made the discussion of precisely how the book of Job influenced Dostoevskii remarkably wide-ranging. In this article I argue for complementing the literary analysis of Dostoevskii's novels with the insights of recent criticism of the book of Job. According to this reading, Job does not provide Dostoevskii with a cognitive answer to the question of why the innocent suffer or explain the existence of evil in the world, but rather acts as a confirmation that faith is a process in which doubt plays a crucial and ongoing role.

Résumé : Le livre de Job est une lecture essentielle pour comprendre l'art littéraire de Dostoïevski parce que dans les deux cas, l'auteur s'engage à répondre aux questions spirituelles les plus fondamentales et que les textes sont construits de la même façon. Toutefois, les ambiguïtés du livre biblique ainsi que le désaccord des critiques sur le rapport entre foi et doute dans l'œuvre de Dostoïevski rendent la discussion au sujet de l'influence du livre de Job sur Dostoïevski remarquablement variée. Cet article suggère que la récente critique littéraire du livre de Job peut aider les lecteurs à mieux comprendre le monde dépeint par Dostoïevski dans ses romans. Le texte biblique a séduit Dostoïevski non pas parce qu'il lui offre une réponse définitive à la question de pourquoi l'innocent souffre ou de l'existence du mal, mais plutôt parce qu'il suggère que le chemin vers la foi est un processus dans lequel les doutes jouent un rôle continu et crucial.

Corresponding author / Adresse de correspondance :

Vanessa Rampton
407 King's College, Cambridge, CB2 1ST, UK.
Email: vanessa.rampton@gmail.com

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Mots clés

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In Dostoevskii's notebooks for *Podrostok* (*A Raw Youth*, 1875) he wrote: "[t]here are no new ideas; the ideas are still the same, beginning with Job" (1969: 449). Scholars have confirmed the centrality of the book of Job for Dostoevskii's work by linking it to the themes of his novels, the sorts of ideas they engage with, the religious concerns that inform them and the way they are constructed. However, ambiguities in the book of Job itself as well as disagreements about the presentation of faith and doubt in Dostoevskii's fiction have made the discussion of precisely what the "idea" of the book of Job is and how it influenced Dostoevskii remarkably wide-ranging. Scholars have emphasized themes such as theodicy, faith-testing, innocent suffering and dialogic portrayals of the truth in their analyses of the influence of Job on Dostoevskii, and new generations of Dostoevskii scholars continue to contribute to the debates engendered by such subjects.

In this article, I argue for complementing the literary analysis of Dostoevskii's novels with the insights of recent criticism of the book of Job. A persistent debate in Dostoevskii studies over the relationship between faith and unbelief presented in his novels can be illuminated by a reading of the book of Job as a text which de-emphasizes the apparent contradictions between faith and doubt by reminding us of the fact that the world exists, in all its incomprehensible forms, and that we can do no more than try to grapple with the implications of this. The clash between opposing points of view in the biblical book thus becomes part of a paradoxical conclusion: Job is comforted by the knowledge that suffering is inexplicable. The more strongly we respond to the idea that reason and debate can only take us so far in explaining these ultimate questions, that our possibilities of comprehension are limited, and that attaining faith is a process, the less urgent the resolution of these matters seems. Dostoevskii's great insight was to turn this potential weakness into an advantage, both as a novelist and as a religious thinker. According to this reading, Job does not provide Dostoevskii with a cognitive answer to the question of why the innocent suffer or explain the existence of evil in the world, but rather acts as a confirmation that faith is a process in which doubts play a crucial and ongoing role.

I begin by discussing some recent approaches in Dostoevskii criticism and critical interpretations of the influence of the book of Job on Dostoevskii in particular. I then examine the scholarly interpretations of the Old Testament book to investigate what sort of light a criticism of the book of Job can shed on Dostoevskii's portrayal of the difficult process of finding faith. In the next section I discuss Job's influence on Dostoevskii in

more detail. After an overview of Dostoevskii's explicit references to the biblical book I focus on three themes that are central in both Dostoevskii's novels and the book of Job – the individual's relationship with God, the potentially redemptive value of suffering, and the question of innocent suffering. I argue that Job provided Dostoevskii not so much with a solution to problems of faith but rather with an imaginative confirmation of the tensions that are inevitably part of religious experience and a potential ally in the battle to overcome the spiritual penury that scientific materialism had helped create in Russia.

Dostoevskii's Art

The arguments Dostoevskii made in personal letters, nonfiction articles and diaries for his own distinctive brand of Orthodox Christianity have done much to encourage a Christian reading of his novels. Dostoevskii repeatedly advocated the need to rediscover a more spiritual reality and decried both western capitalism and socialism for having, as he saw it, fallen away from God. Jones describes Dostoevskii's method as a fundamentally Christian one. "It is as if all his major works revolve around some radical contemporary challenge to Christianity, some expression of unbelief, to which in the course of writing, or planning, Dostoevskii tries to work out the appropriate Christian response" (2002: 160). And by Dostoevskii's own testimony, some of his novels were written explicitly in order to vindicate the Christian worldview. For example, in letters to his editor Liubimov and to the conservative statesman Pobedonostsev in 1879, Dostoevskii affirmed his desire to refute the atheistical propositions in *Brat'ia Karamazovy* (*The Brothers Karamazov*, 1879–80). However, the magnitude of the issues with which Dostoevskii contends and the moral dilemmas that figured so prominently in his own life have made engaging with his fiction much more interesting than the above description implies.

A persistent debate in Dostoevskii studies concerns the issue of whether the author was successful in defending a religious worldview or whether the arguments of his atheistic characters trump those put forward by the more pious ones. Mochul'skii, for example, describes Dostoevskii as having successfully demonstrated that freedom is compatible with Christianity, suggesting that "[n]ever in all world literature has Christianity been advanced with such striking force as the religion of spiritual freedom" (1967: 622). Rosen feels that *The Brothers Karamazov* is a cogent refutation of atheism and that the novel's hero is the spirit of God (1971). These claims are countered by readings such as E. H. Carr's, who affirms that "Ivan's denunciation of God remains more powerful and more cogent than the defence which is put into the mouths of Zosima and Alyosha" (1931: 287). Some critics, such as D. H. Lawrence, Albert Camus and Vasilii Rozanov, have gone even further to suggest that we must therefore conclude that Dostoevskii himself was an atheist.

Various critics have emphasized that Job serves as a model of faith for Dostoevskii, who could well identify with his tests of faith and experience of suffering. Mochul'skii characterizes Dostoevskii's attraction to Job in terms of both Dostoevskii's struggle to believe and his fervent desire to do so: "No one so undauntedly struggled with God as the author of *The Legend of the Grand Inquisitor*, no one so daringly questioned Him about the righteousness of the world's order and no one, perhaps, so loved Him" (1967:

333). Shestov reads the book of Job as the ultimate vindication of faith over reason and concludes that it exemplifies the “struggle against speculative truth and the human dialectic that reduces ‘revelation’ to ‘knowledge’” that was reflected throughout Dostoevskii’s entire oeuvre (1935). Efimova writes that it is Job’s faith and his experience of suffering that confirm Dostoevskii’s sense that suffering serves to expunge sins and that Job’s suffering “redeems the sins of others” (1994: 127).

Other readings of the book of Job take it to be a study in theodicy, and some critics have argued that Job provided Dostoevskii with a convincing model of an attempt to demonstrate the goodness and greatness of God in the face of the existence of evil. Rosen (1971) suggests that, as a theodicy, *The Brothers Karamazov* is modelled on the book of Job. Terras agrees that the book of Job is crucial for understanding the structure of *The Brothers Karamazov* and argues that for Zosima, who is Dostoevskii’s attempt to create a truly perfect man, Job’s God seems heartless and cruel but that nevertheless this world is the best of all possible worlds (1981: 57). Hill Walsh considers that the “theophany from Job forms the basis of Zosima’s ontological proofs for the existence of a just, immanent deity and represents an important element in the *preambula fidei* of Dostoevsky’s theology” (1977: 164).

Some critics have emphasized the parallels between Job’s questioning of God and the scepticism of some of Dostoevskii’s more godless characters, though they see the fact that the novels tend to be weighted against atheistic principles as a confirmation of Dostoevskii’s belief that it was Job’s faith that ultimately redeemed him in the eyes of God. Pachmuss suggests that Ivan Karamazov may be considered an “embodiment of Job in the present-day world” (1979: 35). Rosen finds echoes of Ivan’s rebellion mirrored in the following passages of the book of Job: 14:15; 30:20; 38:3; 40:2; 42:4 (1971: 364 n. 11). Belknap also reads the book of Job as a source “for the most notable character traits of Ivan’s devil” (1990: 137). However, analysis of the challenge of Dostoevskii’s characters to traditional ideas about the justice of God is couched, not so much in terms of praise for their courage, but in terms of criticism of their excessive reliance on reason. Rosen explains the fact that *The Brothers Karamazov* is weighted against Ivan by pointing out that Ivan lacks the “integrity and independence, [. . .] intellectual and spiritual energy [of Job] – which in the end win God’s favour” (1971: 357). Pachmuss explains Job’s redemption and Ivan’s failings thus: “Faith is of primary importance for Job, while for Ivan, reason and dialectic are more important than truth” (1979: 34). Job’s challenge is therefore often interpreted as being conditional on respecting God.

I want to foreground a slightly different reading of the book of Job and argue that, in light of his own conflicted relationship with religious faith, Dostoevskii found Job’s questioning of God deeply sympathetic. At the same time, the biblical book lent comfort to Dostoevskii’s sense of the importance of maintaining faith despite rational arguments and inexplicable events suggesting the contrary. The book of Job’s emphasis on the mystery of creation chimed with his notion that there can never be a schematic description of human nature nor a concrete delimitation of where reason ends and where faith begins. For this reason, Job was a powerful weapon in helping Dostoevskii refute various atheistic arguments, without forcing him to replace one schematic account of human life with another.

Critics have already noted the links between the book of Job and the open-ended quality of Dostoevskii’s art. In *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*, Bakhtin comments that it

was the dialogic element in Job and the fact that “[i]n its structure Job’s dialogue is internally endless, for the opposition of the soul to God – whether the opposition be hostile or humble – is conceived in it as something irrevocable and eternal” that influenced Dostoevskii (1963: 280). Recent criticism on the book of Job such as Newsom’s seminal study (2003) has confirmed that a Bakhtinian reading of Job is not only licit but illuminating. Stordalen underscores the fact that in Job, as in Dostoevskii’s novels, “there is a non-hierarchical presentation of characters’ conflicting views of life and the world”, in which the author’s position is not privileged, allowing the texts to depict a dialogic sense of truth (2006: 28).

Recent studies have challenged and refined Bakhtin’s ideas to offer valuable insight into Dostoevskii’s penchant for teasing out the paradoxical nature of humanity’s most important questions, and for drawing on those writers who revel in such paradoxes. This criticism has argued forcefully against any attempt to over-simplify Dostoevskii’s art, and recognized that the fascination with heteroglossia in his texts exists alongside his desire to discover and communicate the complex truth that relativist or religious readings of his texts often attempt to deny. In particular, critics have argued that in Dostoevskii’s work we have no predetermined path to religious belief, but rather a valorization of the process of coming to terms with the fact that issues of faith might turn out to be problems without an answer. Gatrall suggests that the images of contradiction that Dostoevskii presents so well call out “for responses to the questions of God and of the justice of his created world while simultaneously making all answers inadequate” (2001: 231). In an approach that advocates a close rereading of *The Brothers Karamazov*, Murav insists that Dostoevskii’s work is centrally concerned with the paradoxes inherent in Christianity. She develops the idea that faith and doubt cannot be separated, since they exist together and mutually enrich one another: “Death, removal, absence, loss, and substitution are what make faith possible and destroy faith” (2004: 769).

In what follows, I want to see to what extent criticism of the book of Job can shed light on the issues raised by Dostoevskii’s fiction, in light of the direction that Dostoevskii scholarship has taken. In particular, I shall focus on interpretations that highlight the ambiguities of the book of Job and the confrontation of opposing points of view that it contains, yet nevertheless suggest that the book does much more than simply express the indeterminacy of human nature and the world. The author of Job has been described by Gordis as “too deep a religious thinker to believe that any neatly articulated system of man can comprehend the beauty and the tragedy of existence. Yet he is too great an intellect to abdicate the use of reason and reflection in pondering the mystery of evil and comprehending as much of it as we can” (1965: 53). Part of the author’s challenge was the depiction of the process of coming to terms with one’s own limitations without opting for a deterministic account of what those limitations are. A couple of millennia later, Dostoevskii found himself face to face with a similar challenge.

Critical Interpretations of the Book of Job

The book of Job is a dense and much discussed text that has been recognized as both – an outstanding literary work as well as an important theological one. In light of the complexity of the issues raised by the book – the problem of the suffering of the righteous,

the struggle to maintain faith and personal integrity in the face of indifference and evil, the nature of the relationship between individuals and God – and its ambiguous answers to these vast questions, the story of Job has been read in an impressive range of ways. Other biblical references to the “righteousness” of Job (Ezekiel 14:14; 14:20) and the “patience” of Job (James 5:11) anticipated the reading of Job as a pious and patient sufferer in early rabbinic and Christian circles (for a discussion see Dell 1991: 6-29). Most contemporary interpreters of Job, however, read Job’s story as one in which different ideas coexist uneasily and as an account of how suffering can occasion a loss of faith in the justice of God. In this respect, the development of scholarship’s literary-critical concerns with regards to Job and Dostoevskii’s novels shows some revealing points of connection: rather than discussing these works in terms of absolutes, critics have increasingly emphasized the respective portrayal of different points of view as a way of musing about how the structure of the book can complement authorial intentions and beliefs.

Scholars such as Marvin H. Pope, Georg Fohrer, and Harold H. Rowley have written on Job from a historical-critical perspective, placing emphasis on the composition of the text, its sources and linguistic features in their attempts to discern the message of the biblical book. Disagreements about which part of the text is genuine have influenced subsequent interpretations of the interests of the book. The third round of the dialogue between Job and his friends (22-7) is incomplete, the wisdom poem (28) and Elihu speeches (32-37) are regarded by most scholars as secondary, the prologue and epilogue are sometimes considered to be a later interpolation. In addition, the book’s language is one of the most difficult in the Old Testament, both because of the use of rare words and a fragmented original, whose multiple versions attest to the difficulties of translators and commentators of the text. These factors have resulted in the fact that attempts to reconstruct the precise history of the composition of the text and to pronounce definitively on the authenticity of its constituent parts command nothing like universal assent. Partly under the influence of postmodernism and partly because of an awareness of the inadequacy of contemporary criteria, biblical critics are increasingly sceptical of the notion that it is possible to reconstruct an original and authentic text. For the non-specialist reader, the book nevertheless demonstrates a unity of structure and narrative, and this is what I shall examine here.

A number of scholars emphasize the centrality of the concept of retribution for the book of Job. Hoffman describes it as a “systematic anthology of reflections, problems and possible (or impossible) solutions regarding the concept of retribution” (1992: 127-28). Gordis focuses on the discussion of retributive justice between Job and his friends, in which the friends present the traditional view that suffering is punishment for having sinned and Job argues against them that suffering can be occasioned by God’s arbitrary power, as a key point in the book (1971). The rough consensus among contemporary interpreters is that the book of Job disagrees with the doctrine according to which individuals receive reward and punishment commensurate with their actions, and some have argued expressly that the purpose of Job is to controvert the theory that suffering is evidence of God’s displeasure (See Dell, 1991: 35).

The theory of redemptive suffering as articulated in Elihu’s speeches has also attracted the attention of biblical commentators. A number of significant early twentieth-century interpreters such as Karl Budde, Carl Cronill and Yehezkel

Kauffmann read Elihu's speeches, in which he affirms that undeserved suffering serves to discipline human beings and prevent them from sinning in the future, as the central message of the book of Job. Though most contemporary scholars reject the view that Job's story confirms the unequivocal value of suffering, some have argued that it is precisely Job's experience of suffering that brings him closer to God. Leaman, for example, suggests that suffering acts as the impetus to examine and evaluate one's relationship with God, and to transform oneself in response to suffering (1995).

The issue of theodicy, or the question of God's justice, has also been used to frame the issues of the book of Job. A minority of scholars have argued that the biblical book offers a cognitive explanation of suffering. Tsevat, for example, suggests that Job comes to realize that God is neither just nor unjust – he is simply God. God is not responsible for the type of suffering that Job experiences, and the only justice to be found in the world is that which human beings create (1966: 105). Both Brenner (1981) and Tsevat argue that God's speeches support the theory that evil is part of creation; Brenner explains Job's sufferings in light of the idea that, though God himself is ethical and just, he cannot eradicate evil, although he can subdue it.

Most commentators, however, highlight the elusive nature of God's address from the tempest – which does not answer Job's queries as to why the innocent suffer or the nature of divine justice – to conclude that there is no rational explanation for suffering. Tilley argues that the book of Job demonstrates the failings of the "systematic totalization" a theodicy requires (1989: 267). From a rather different standpoint, Steinmann claims that God "makes no attempt to justify his decision to allow Job to suffer" and explores the idea that suffering is merely a factor that brings Job into a struggle to maintain his integrity and faith in God (1996: 86). In the light of their sense that Job does not answer the question of how a just God can allow a righteous person to suffer, scholars have suggested that, given that no theodicy is possible, the comforting aspect of the message of Job lies in some other experience, such as faith or a feeling of closeness to God.

Some have interpreted God's response to Job as a study, not of how to understand undeserved suffering, but rather how to react to it. Crenshaw emphasizes the radical nature of Job's protests, notably that Job believes that God has become his personal enemy, and the diverse ways that Job protests against God (1984). Yet there is evidence within the biblical book that one of the best ways to maintain one's integrity is to question God rather than to rest on tradition – after all, God himself praises Job's reaction to hardship over that of his friends (42:7). Davidson argues that Job's protests against God are ultimately justified: "There was more faith in such deeply questioning protests and scepticism than in the pious affirmation of untroubled, but blind, certainty" (1983: 183). The consensus here seems to be that the book of Job is ultimately a confirmation of the fact that faith and doubt can coexist within the religious believer.

Others have questioned the notion of trying to find in Job's dialogues a unitary truth. Good (1990) and Clines (1990) discuss how the arguments of the book's different participants can serve to undermine each other's positions, depriving them of claims to the truth. In her study, Newsom argues for a Bakhtinian interpretation of the book in which the author does not give up a passionate claim to the truth but rather adopts a position of humility which is "open to the possibility of modification in light of dialogical engagement" (2003: 262). This is, in fact, a reaffirmation of a traditional position. One of the

subtletest implications of the consequences of the representation of the clash between ideas and throwing everything into question was anticipated by Chesterton more than a century ago. He emphasizes that God's answer to Job, that there are things far stranger in the world than he could ever have imagined, and that he should "go on doubting, [. . .] doubt a little more, [. . .] doubt every day newer and wilder things in the universe, until at last, by some strange enlightenment, he may begin to doubt himself", leads to theism rather more easily than it leads to atheism (1969 [1907]: 234). One consequence of the confrontation between opposing points of view is that readers are more likely to question the validity of their own convictions and find it easier to accept that certain things must remain unresolved. In turn, this symbiotic relationship between doubt and faith is an informative background against which to consider Dostoevskii's novels.

A number of points raised in the criticism of Job are pertinent for an analysis of the book's influence on Dostoevskii. In particular, there is evidence to support the claim that Job's questioning of God and struggle to maintain his faith are a valid part of believers' experience. The way that suffering complements religious insight is also explored by Dostoevskii in many of his novels. Finally, the alternatives to reading the book of Job as a theodicy tend to emphasize the elusive nature of God's response to Job and the fact that suffering may turn out to be a problem without a rational explanation, a formulation that it could be argued proved to be particularly congenial to Dostoevskii.

Dostoevskii's References to Job

Having considered the fundamental issues in the book of Job, I now want to turn to some of the ways Job influenced Dostoevskii directly. Dostoevskii read the book of Job first when he was very young and then again in his mid-fifties. (See Efimova [1994] for a discussion of which version of the Old Testament Dostoevskii had access to.) In 1875, the effect on him of the book of Job was one of agitation. Dostoevskii wrote to his wife: "I've been reading the book of Job, and it puts me in a state of frenzied excitement: I quit reading and pace around the room for an hour or so, almost in tears [. . .]. That book, Ania, it's strange – is one of the first that affected me in my life. I was only a child then!" It was at this time, while working on *A Raw Youth* and *The Brothers Karamazov*, that Dostoevskii's engagement with the issues raised in the book of Job became more obvious. In the years that followed, Dostoevskii made various references to it, both in his notebooks and completed works.

Many of Dostoevskii's notebook references are cryptic and seem more like fragments of thought than coherent arguments. For example, in his notebooks for *A Raw Youth* Dostoevskii writes: "Versilov himself used to pay visits to Makar. I was very anxious to hear what they might be talking about. They are interpreting Job" (1969: 503). Nevertheless, one discernible recurrent theme is Job's children and the way they were used to test his faith. In Book Three of *The Brothers Karamazov*, Feodor Karamazov's servant Grigorii, whose only child died in infancy, is said to "love the book of Job" (XIV: 88-9). It is the psychological question of how Job can love his new children while honouring the memory of the ones he loses that is of interest to Dostoevskii. "Job loved other children (the Lady). The *transfer* of love. He did not forget the others. The faith that we will live again and will discover each other once again in general harmony" (1971:

32). Presumably, when Dostoevskii alludes to the fact that the “Lord tempted Job – took away his Children” (1971: 95), he is in part inspired by his own familial situation, for Dostoevskii’s infant daughter, Sonia, had died in 1870 and his young son, Alesha, in 1878. Many of Dostoevskii’s allusions to Job’s children point in the direction of the importance of maintaining faith as a grieving father and of finding solace for personal loss, a process that particularly affected Dostoevskii in his last years.

Job is mentioned most prominently in Book Six of *The Brothers Karamazov*, when dying Father Zosima retells the story of Job to a small group of friends and disciples. Zosima emphasizes the impenetrable nature of God’s justice and the limits of human understanding. Zosima’s somewhat idiosyncratic use of Job, with no mention of his claims of innocence, no reference to his demand that God answer him nor to God’s reply, must be considered as part of a larger answer to Ivan Karamazov’s arguments against divine justice developed in Book Five. In a letter to his editor, Liubimov, Dostoevskii wrote that the idea of that book “is to depict the extreme blasphemy and the core of the destructive idea of our age in Russia, among young people who are divorced from reality. [Book Six will be] the refutation of their blasphemy and anarchism, which I am now preparing in the last words of the dying Elder Zosima.”

The use of the book of Job in the structure of *The Brothers Karamazov* – Terras notes that Dostoevskii makes “a point of mentioning the book of Job repeatedly, to make sure the reader will draw it into the context of the novel” (1981: 167 fn 18) – points to the fact that Dostoevskii’s interest in Job goes well beyond the specific references he made to the biblical book. Some of the themes of the biblical book are evident in many of his great novels.

The Freedom to Question Faith

Job helped Dostoevskii dramatize the nature of the individual’s relationship with God based on the idea that humans are free beings, but that there are still certain moral imperatives that limit freedom. Dostoevskii was keenly aware of the potential dangers of what he considered to be erroneous views of freedom. Excessive freedom for man threatens to put man in God’s place, and Dostoevskii’s intellectual rebels “proclaim the higher law of a superior being who is convinced that since God is dead (or merely imagined, as Kirillov argues) and since immortality does not exist, he has the moral right to occupy the place of God” (Pachmuss, 1979: 31). Dostoevskii found in Job a potential ally against the atheists, who advocated a kind of deification of man and who jettisoned God with impunity. At the same time, scholars such as Davidson and Crenshaw have argued that the book of Job illustrates the freedom human beings have to question God. The tension inherent in the relationship between faith and freedom is exemplified in many of Dostoevskii’s characters and in his attempt to reconcile freedom with religious principles.

An array of examples from Dostoevskii’s best known fiction suggest themselves. *Zapiski iz podpol’ia* (*Notes from Underground*, 1864) tells a story of a man obsessed with his own suffering, cut off from humanity, divorced from religion and a querulous adherent of an exclusive conception of freedom. Yet Dostoevskii’s novel also demonstrates, in contrast to the story of Job, how the Underground Man’s egoism is the source

of his own unhappiness: his life is devoted to asserting his freedom but in the final analysis he is isolated from God and humanity. *Notes from Underground* has been criticized precisely because the Underground Man fails to fundamentally change his beliefs and acknowledge God's greatness along the lines that Job does. D. H. Lawrence, for example, claims that "[i]f you want a story of your own soul, it is perfectly done in the book of Job – much better than in [Dostoevskii's] *Letters from the Underworld*" (1962: 301).

However, Dostoevskii's Underground Man has more in common with human experience than Lawrence implies here, and Dostoevskii's insight complements the one offered by the book of Job. Presumably, Dostoevskii's answer to Lawrence would be that it is desirable to master one's egoism and ask for forgiveness from God, but that human nature prevents us from affirming that there is a predetermined path by which such a process can be effected. Much of *Notes from Underground* is devoted to proving, against the materialists, that human behaviour cannot be determined schematically. The Underground Man's capacity for refuting Chernyshevskii and the atheists depends on his being able to form and analyse his own motives in an unpredictable way. Ending his story by having him embrace Christian convictions would make Dostoevskii's message too predictable and therefore less convincing. Nevertheless, there are hints within the text as we have it and in a letter written in 1864 to Dostoevskii's brother Mikhail that the story did not necessarily need to end with the destruction of the Underground Man. As it stands, however, Dostoevskii's message is in favour of freedom rather than faith; the Underground Man could have embraced Christian convictions and eventually found faith, but he is also free not to do so.

Raskol'nikov is another of the characters through whom Dostoevskii discusses the relationship between faith and freedom. In its outline, the story of Raskol'nikov seems to confirm that it is by taking up Christian values that one finds happiness. Raskol'nikov commits a crime as the result of his desire to assert ultimate freedom, yet by affirming his freedom and turning his back on Christian values, he ends up unhappier than he was before. Sonia, when she looks at Raskol'nikov, sees "horrible, infinite unhappiness" (VI: 252), a man isolated from God. It is by adhering to justice and to love that Raskol'nikov is renewed and regenerated (the words are taken from the epilogue to *Prestuplenie i nakazanie (Crime and Punishment, 1866)*) and thus moves closer towards attaining the spiritual comfort Job eventually received. However, there is a lot of evidence in *Crime and Punishment* to embarrass a Christian reading of the novel and to show that it proved difficult for Dostoevskii to reconcile the freedom to question authority that he valued with any prior system of values. Nuttall, for example, argues that the fact that Raskol'nikov is able to find a new life without repenting of his crime or prostrating himself before God bears witness to Dostoevskii's sense of the validity of Raskol'nikov's moral claim to freedom (1978).

The Brothers Karamazov is also fundamentally concerned with the right to question a higher authority. As mentioned above, the rebellions of the Karamazov sons against their father and Ivan's discussion with Alesha have a clear parallel with Job's rebellion against God. "What is at stake is important: the right of the child to raise his hand against his father is for Dostoevsky the right of man to raise his hand against God" (Wasiolok 1964: 150). What evidence do we have to support the claim that it was his challenge

to God that was the undoing of Ivan? Ivan's revolt has been described as "deep and powerful and *unanswerable*. The roots go deeper than reason; the antagonist is more powerful" (Wasiolek 1964: 161). In characterizing Ivan Karamazov's indictment of God, Dostoevskii wrote in a letter: "my hero takes a theme which in my opinion is irrefutable: the senselessness of the suffering of children, and draws from it the absurdity of all historical actuality" (1879). Though the weight of Dostoevskii's book is against Ivan and we are given to understand that his conclusions are mistaken, I would argue that it is not so much the radical nature of his questioning of God but his understanding of God that prevents him from receiving the spiritual comfort that Job does. As Nuttall puts it, "Ivan's great error lay in not seeing God is the author of freedom, not rule" (1978: 84). Thus it is Ivan's misunderstanding of God and freedom that forces him to re-evaluate his ideals.

Dostoevskii warns that humankind will suffer if they break the divine link that binds them to God by subscribing to an erroneous view of freedom or by rejecting faith in favour of reason. Yet none of these conclusions prescribes a model of behaviour, not even a negative one. Just as Dostoevskii does not believe in a kind of schematic description of human nature, neither does he believe in drawing the line to delimit where freedom or reason ends and where faith begins, since that would simply be replacing one schematic account with another.

The Redemptive Value of Suffering

Although Job's story is hardly an orthodox representation of redemptive suffering, it leaves open the possibility that it is through suffering that Job arrives at a higher understanding of God, the more circumspect proposition that the book of Job's religious commentators have explored at length. The way that Job's agony finally results in spiritual serenity helped Dostoevskii dramatize the process whereby hardship can produce the best human qualities. At the same time, the ambiguities of the book's central message do not support a simplistic reading in which faith is contingent on undergoing hardship and suffering. In part, this coincided with Dostoevskii's own religious experience: in a letter to Natalia Fonvizina in 1854 he wrote: "I have experienced and felt it for myself [...] that in such moments one thirsts like 'parched grass' for faith, and finds it precisely because the truth shines more clearly in misfortune."

Dostoevskii believed that anguish impels individuals to find spiritual satisfaction, and excelled at "showing how the best kind of pity and charity can emerge only from a background of the blackest degradation" (Nuttall, 1978: 79). Given this relationship between suffering and faith, much of Dostoevskii's work suggests that certain types of suffering can be morally valuable. E. H. Carr argues that the doctrine of salvation through suffering is "the central truth of [Dostoevskii's] religious and moral belief" (1931: 198). More recently, Efimova writes that "Dostoevskii's view that individuals can expunge their sins only through suffering is well-known both in Russia and abroad" (1994: 126). And in a famous example from *The Brothers Karamazov*, Elder Zosima suggests that suffering is a way to attaining a higher understanding of God and self. "Go at once and seek suffering for yourself, as if you yourself were guilty. Take these sufferings upon yourself and your heart will find comfort" (XIV: 291-2).

Yet Dostoevskii's portrayal of suffering is hardly unequivocal and he is far from suggesting that all suffering is morally sanctified. Like Job, Raskol'nikov resists all those who claim that he needs to suffer. He complains "they say it is necessary for me to suffer! Why do I need these senseless sufferings? Shall I know any better what they are for, when I am crushed by hardships and idiocy, and as weak as an old man after twenty years of prison?" (VI: 401). For this reason, Raskol'nikov's resistance to "the facile pains held out on every side" has been compared to Job's (Nuttall 1978: 70). In Dostoevskii's notebooks there is a fragment of evidence that suggests that he had a certain admiration for this rebellious side in Raskol'nikov (1967: 58). After all, Jesus too was nothing if not a rebel, and his sense of having been forsaken by God, poignantly expressed when he is dying on the cross, links him with humanity just as surely as his perfection makes him a worthy but impossible ideal for man. Just as Dostoevskii could be sympathetic to characters who rejected the injunction to suffer, he did not always portray those who recommend suffering in a sympathetic light. An example in *Crime and Punishment* is Porfirii, the police investigator, who says roundly that suffering "is a great thing" (VI: 352), yet this does not make him any more sympathetic in the eyes of the author or the reader.

The issues raised in Job help show how Dostoevskii's attitude towards suffering is linked to his sense that there are depths of human nature that are not immediately explicable. In *A Raw Youth*, Makar Ivanovich raises the issue of what Job has learnt from losing his first children. He asks "is it possible that Job, who has suffered so much, could be comforted on seeing his new children and forget his dead children? That is impossible!" (IX: 330). Yet the claim that the scars of suffering heal over time seems to be psychologically valid. Real life examples abound, and Emerson's words written a year after losing his young son speak poignantly to this issue: "I grieve that grief can teach me nothing" he writes, testifying both to the extent of his suffering and to his surprise at how quickly it passed (1844).

By drawing on the book of Job, Dostoevskii is able to develop his insight that suffering impels one to make peace with God. At the same time, his sense of the complexity of the task made him aware that the redemptive value of suffering could not be the whole solution to his characters' problems. Dostoevskii stopped short of prescribing affliction as a way to finding truth, something that was much closer to the consequentialist ethics of his intellectual adversaries.

Innocent Suffering

The book of Job's description of a world in which God exists and yet certain actions are obviously vile lends support to Dostoevskii's own sense that evil coexists along with good. Dostoevskii rejects a God that is equated with the good, namely because this would reduce religion to ethics. As Nuttall points out, "[t]he whole history of modern theology implies that if God is not a tyrant he is little better than an ethical mist. Those who reject the stern Father end by worshipping the fact that love is a good thing" (1978: 84). This reduction is also incompatible with Dostoevskii's view of freedom, which includes an authentic choice between good and evil. Thus good and evil coexist; and rather than evil being a reason to renounce God, it is paradoxical proof of God's existence. In these ways, the Old Testament

book helps Dostoevskii attack rationalistic notions that require the “justification” of God, even while it shows him how to dramatize the importance of maintaining faith in the face of innocent suffering. Along with its rejection of the idea of retributive justice, much of the scholarly criticism on Job has been devoted to teasing out the implications of a world in which suffering is inexplicable and only God can know its rationale.

Because of the book of Job’s implicit rejection of religious utilitarianism, it proved to be a valuable weapon against those who advocated the suffering of innocents as a means to further humanity’s progress. It is worth remembering that in Dostoevskii’s time, the majority of the Russian radical intelligentsia subscribed to some version of Chernyshevskian materialism and belief in the supremacy of reason. Some of the social and political thinkers that Dostoevskii was writing against were eager to tolerate or even exacerbate the suffering of others in the present as a means to realizing a perfect future. Lenin, someone who was greatly influenced by their utilitarian calculations, refused to participate in relief work during the Volga famine of 1891-2 on the grounds that “famine, a natural result of the social order, would tend to revolutionise the masses” (Conquest, 1972: 21-2). One of the reasons the book of Job struck a responsive chord in Dostoevskii was that its emphasis on the fact that suffering is God’s domain confirmed his sense that the happiness of humanity cannot be bought at the expense of the suffering of innocents.

It is in *The Brothers Karamazov* that the atheistic argument suggesting that a God who permits innocent suffering is not worthy of worship is developed in most detail. Ivan tells Alesha a number of anecdotes about atrocities committed against children and concludes that he reserves judgement on the existence of God, but that if he exists and this kind of suffering is the price we are required to pay for future entry into paradise, then the cost is too high and he “respectfully returns the ticket” (XIV: 223). Part of the refutation of Ivan’s argument – Dostoevskii suggested that the whole novel should serve as a refutation – is done by Elder Zosima who, while retelling the book of Job, celebrates the fact that mystery is a crucial part of human experience. ‘But the greatness of it is that here there is a mystery – that here the earth’s transitory truth and eternal truth have come into contact with each other’ (XIV: 265).

By suggesting that religious utilitarianism in which the wicked are eventually punished and the good rewarded is misguided, Dostoevskii formulated an answer to atheistic arguments that innocent suffering is a reason to renounce faith. In Dostoevskii’s view the materialists that Ivan represents are basing their arguments on humans’ limited understanding of God’s creation. It follows that if suffering is part of God’s design then it cannot be instrumentalized by individuals to further collective progress.

As Dostoevskii articulated his own convictions about the condition of being human, the book of Job provided him with a model of a text in which different voices, different truths, and religious doubts lead to faith. This conclusion offered solace to Dostoevskii in his own, troubled relationship with faith. His description of Tolstoi’s Levin as someone who, had *Anna Karenina* continued, would have inevitably torn his faith again “on some mental nail of his own making” (Tolstoi 1975 [1873-7]: Introduction) tells us as much about Dostoevskii as it does about Levin. As Dostoevskii learned that doubts need not undermine faith and that there is no predetermined process involved in becoming a religious believer, he himself came closer to finding faith. At the end of his life Dostoevskii confessed that he “had reached faith through a furnace of doubt” (XXVII: 86), but this

implies a finality that the believer can never experience. Faith *is* the furnace, as Dostoevskii's work and Job make clear. Job's lessons and Dostoevskii's novels are a tribute to the effort involved in finding faith, to the inevitability of questioning it in difficult circumstances, and to the tenacity of character necessary for holding on to it.

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